

Return to Sender

by Fedex

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Summary: Shortly after the Covenant invasion of Earth, Sergeant Kelly Pierce is thrown into the thick of things as she and her unlikely ally trying to stop the Prophet of Truth from destroying her homeworld. CH 2 UP

1. The Mailman

A/N: I usually don't write fanfiction (I do original), but since all my friends were doing it, I decided to give it a try. Anyways, being a whole original fiction writer, I decided to steer as far away from the Halo plot as possible (while staying coherent). So, don't be expecting to follow in Master Chief's footsteps. Although you will meet him later on, he is not a main character in the story (oops, spoiler). I hope you can still enjoy this.

_Constructive criticism is gladly welcome, flaming is too.

—

****Chapter 1 The Mailman****

****North America****

****Colorado Plateau 108.56 35.89****

****February 20, 2553 Military Calendar****

****86:34 Mission Clock****

Lying prone on the gritty sand, First Sergeant Kelly Pierce gazed over the vast plain of sand from the safety of a sheer cliff. In her right hand, she firmly clutched the right handle of a S2 AM Sniper Rifle, its black barrel protruding out like an obsidian spear. The relentless sun had baked through the ebony colored armor and was seeping into the thick fabric, causing Kelly to perspire. She shifted slightly to her left, trying to appease the discomfort in her legs. She wished that her new armor came with the climate control system

that had been recently removed from the previous model. The new prototype MJOLNR Mark V armor, which had just been issued to her special operations unit, was awkward and uncomfortable. Yet she knew that they were well worth it. A few months ago, the military had given these one-of-a-kind prototypes to Kelly and her team in order to test out how the suit would react with non-augmented soldiers. At first, the First Sergeant had looked upon the role of guinea pig with disdain, but after finding out that the Master Chief had worn the same type of armor into combat, she instantly changed her mind.

Although Kelly never met the Master Chief, she had heard quite a bit from other soldiers in her division. Some marines had told her that the Master Chief had been genetically altered, or that he had single-handedly killed thousands of Covenant troops on a mysterious ring-shaped planet. The countless rumors that had been spreading around the Marine Corps seemed to be over exaggerated and absurd, but after getting into the Mark V herself, she began to wonder how much many of them were actually true. From what she could tell, the Master Chief had once been a human, but was given some sort of augmentation which allowed him to wear the original Mark V. The new Mark V had obviously been toned down a bit in order to accommodate regular soldiers. Yet the suit still felt like it gave her superhuman abilities. During the testing exercises on Cairo Station, Kelly had immediately felt an increase in speed, agility, strength, and stamina. So much in fact, that she had bruised her shoulders and broken several ribs. Only after several months of training did she learn to operate the Mark V fastidiously. Now, as she gazed into the horizon, the MJOLNR suit had become a second skin.

Still lying prone, Kelly scanned the sea of sand for any signs of the enemy. The recent Covenant invasion of Earth had caught even the Marine Corps off guard. Although the offensive forces were surprisingly few, the unprepared marines were only able to maintain a weak counter-attack. Without military personnel searching every square mile of solid ground, it was safe to assume that there would still be Covenant forces left on Earth. This posed an even greater danger for Pierce, as she was scheduled for evacuation in two hours. Her mission wasn't to exterminate all hostile targets, but putting a whole the size of a walnut in any Covenants' head seemed satisfying.

The heat made Kelly's reflexes slow, and her eyes harder to keep open. It was almost hopeless to find anything in this suicidal weather. Even the Covenant, she thought, would be smart enough to stay in some kind of shelter. But just as she was about to pack her gear and move out, she noticed specks of black approaching from the horizon. The bewildered Sergeant threw off her helmet and rubbed her eyes thoroughly to confirm that it wasn't a hallucination and reached back behind her to retrieve a pair of DGZ 40 Binoculars. She squinted her eyes for several seconds in an attempt to see clearly, but soon gave up and put the binoculars up to her face.

The image was fuzzy at first, but the digital zoom on the binoculars automatically focused in on the unknown targets. As Kelly peered through the binoculars, her heart sank. In the center of the viewing radius, she saw a conglomeration of Brutes, Jackals, and Drones, and Hunters. The two new additions to the Covenant arsenal, the Brutes and the Drones seemed to dominate the group while the Jackals followed obediently. She zoomed in to check their weapons and found

that each Brute shouldered their signature plasma rifle while several Jackals dragged along beam rifles, the Covenant answer to the S2 AM Sniper Rifle. She shifted the lens toward the right, focusing on the Hunters who had predictably carried a deadly plasma cannon and a gigantic shield. But these Hunters had a plasma field surrounding their cannons and legs. If Kelly wasn't mistaken, they looked as if they had been taken prisoner by the others. Perhaps there had been a fight among the different species? She would tell her superiors about this strange occurrence when she returned to command, but for now, she didn't care if they were Brutes, Hunters, Drones, or senile serpents on flying chairs, all of them needed some ventilation in the cranium.

First Sergeant Pierce hastily threw down her binoculars and switched to her sniper rifle. She turned her attention to the two inch zoom screen and clicked twice, revealing a ten times magnification of the original position. As a trained sniper, Pierce had a dead steady arm which at times was so still, it didn't seem to have been attached to her body. This along with the extra boost from the Mark V made her sniping skills the envy of the whole Marine Corps. It was in situations such as these that her dead arm really paid off.

Maneuvering the sniper only several millimeters at a time, the Sergeant was able to track down her prey. She looked through the screen to see the same gang of Covenant trudging across the barren desert. Didn't these excuses for aliens know not to walk in the open like that? She suddenly felt a pang of remorse for these aliens. Perhaps they were just like her, blindly following their commanders into the fray of chaos without question. Perhaps humans and Covenant alike shared a common instinct, making them only look different. They had been fighting their war, and the humans had been fighting theirs. Why then, did they have to be mortal enemies?

The small circular reticule switched from the usual pale blue to red. Kelly had a clear shot at the completely oblivious Brute. She thought again about her connection with the barbaric simian, but knew that she had orders to follow. Besides, she reassured herself, those were the very thoughts that put soldiers out of duty and into the psychiatric ward. Slowly, she coaxed her ambivalent feelings toward the Covenant down and focused on the task at hand.

Not even realizing it, Kelly had unconsciously followed the Brute's head with her sniper rifle. The dull red which was the reticule taunted her once again, just as she had been invited before the ludicrous thoughts of "unity" infected her mind. Her sweaty hand inched past the trigger guard and rested just in front of the trigger. Life and death were now being measured in inches.

The excited Sergeant began her signature chant, "11 stupid Covies, walking in the sand, unaware of where my bullet will land. There goes one, then another, pretty soon they'll all be fodder," as she chanted with utter stoicism, 11 bands of depressurized gas streamed towards their target. The disturbance had ended in a fraction of a second, resulting in 11 dead carcasses attracting flies. The sergeant inspected the Covenant bodies again, making sure that no one was left alive. Just as she had predicted, each alien had acquired a new ear piercing that was bigger than their ear. Pierce silently chuckled as she remembered her five ear piercings, and the pain that accompanied it.

Suddenly remembering that she was due for evac, Sergeant Pierce checked her military watch. She had previously programmed the mission timer to two hours. It now read five minutes. According to the last transmission that had scrolled across Pierce's HUD, the Pelican drop ship would arrive from the west. The sergeant reached backwards to retrieve the helmet that she had thrown down before and fit it snugly on her head. She turned due west and scanned the area. The sky was empty, save for the white clouds which dotted the sky. She turned away to pack her gear in disappointment when she heard a familiar voice.

"Well, well, well, I'd never have thought that Miss Pierce needed my help," the voice over the radio put a smile on Kelly's face.

"Last time I recall, I was the one who saved your ass Charlie. I wouldn't be making judgments so soon," she retorted coolly.

"I woulda done fine myself. But you had to steal my kill from 100 meters off. Sometimes, I think that sniper of yours is a real cheap shot."

"Hey, Who's weapon are you calling cheap? Those damn bullet hoses of yours'll fire 360 rounds per minute. You just mind your business and I'll mind mine," Kelly was always stubborn when it came to her sniper. As she talked, the bulky Pelican came into view. Along with it, a large yellow dot appeared on her motion tracker and continued to move closer to the center of the circle. Although bulky, the Pelican flew with surprising speed towards the sergeant. Within two minutes, it had touched down safely on the large plateau, ready for Pierce to board. The aptly named Pelican had a large containment hold in the rear of the ship to transport troops to and from battle. First Sergeant Kelly Pierce readied her things and stepped aboard Pelican Charlie 351. The metal bird immediately took off before Kelly could even grab hold of the railings. The sudden jerk knocked her off her feet and almost threw her off the ship.

"Sorry about that dear, but we're runnin behind schedule. Command wants you back ASAP," Charlie said over the radio. The disgruntled sergeant muttered a "bullshit" and got back to her feet, this time making sure to hold onto the railings.

The pelican continued to ascend, reaching an altitude of nearly 300 meters. Having at least some moment of peace, Kelly removed her helmet and rested her eyes. The past three and a half days had been a journey through hell as her team tried to infiltrate a Covenant hideout in Mesa Verde. The original team of 20 was too few to even breach the front gates, let alone quell the enemies. At first however, the missions seemed to go along fine. The small team had arrived several Klicks south of the supposed location without encountering any resistance. _The Covenant must have been planning at the time_, Kelly reminisced. As they headed north to the cliffs, they could only see several jackals that patrolled the area. These proved easy to silence and the team had moved on easily. It wasn't until her team reached the entrance to the hideout that they encountered serious resistance. Sergeant Pierce remembered the chaos as she and her comrades desperately tried to fend off the savage Brutes and Drones.

Before there was time to organize a counter-attack, half her team had

died. Without even issuing a command, the marines had known to retreat. Strangely, the Covenant did not follow them. Her team trekked back to the LZ and everyone that was left had been picked up, everyone except for her. The sergeant shuddered as she recounted the last few days.

All of a sudden, Kelly's thoughts were rudely interrupted by a fierce shock. She was pulled from the handrails and sent tumbling on the metal grating

"That Kelly was not me," Charlie's voice was nervous, "Looks like we've got fuel rod on the ground. Take them out now!"

Without hesitating, the sergeant crawled up from her prostrate position and assembled her sniper. The all too familiar click of the ammo brought reassurance back to her. She quickly clicked the sniper two times and looked topside. There, just as Charlie had reported over the radio, was a Jackal firing wildly toward the Pelican. Along with it were a group of Brutes and lesser Jackals. Although the Brutes normally posed a much greater danger with their abrupt berserker charges, this Jackal was carrying a fuel rod cannon. The fuel rod cannon was a new weapon in the Covenant arsenal which acted just as the canon on a Hunter. However, its arched path toward the enemy often made it inaccurate.

Charlie's voice came over the Pelican loudspeaker again, this time louder and less comical, "I said now girl, before they turn us into molten rock!" Kelly disregarded her pilot's last message. Sniping was a tedious task that took several minutes to aim with. Of course those "SpraynPray" bastards never understood any of it. She focused the reticule on the excited Jackal, trying to move the barrel in sync with the Pelican. After several seconds, Kelly was confident that she would score a shot and pulled the trigger just as a mortar of plasma flashed before her eyes.

A fraction of a second later, the Pelican shuddered again. This time it jerked hard left and fell.

"Mayday, Mayday! Pelican Charlie 351 is going down! Kelly! Hold onto something!" The bulky ship plunged and Kelly could feel herself in freefall. Her heart seemed to move up her neck and into her head. She slowly looked out the bay walkway and saw the mass of sand. Still in freefall, Pierce decided to take her chances with sand than metal. She slowly crawled out of the Pelican bay door and pushed off from the walkway, with her sniper and helmet in tow.

Immediately, the harsh air began to rush up the sergeant's nose. The sand particles in the air combined with her freefall stung her face and rushed into her mouth. Her throat was filled with sand and dust, making her gag instinctively. Luckily the fall was short as Kelly came to an abrupt stop in the cushion-like sand. She made an effort to stand up but was forced to fall back down by the lack of oxygen in her lungs. Taking heavy breaths, Kelly arched her back and began to gag out all the sand that had stuck to the back of her lungs.

Still exhausted from the many days of hardship, Pierce wanted nothing more but to lie down and catch up on her much needed sleep. Yet, there were still Brutes and Jackals only several hundred meters off. Pierce forced herself up, every muscle in her frail body straining. She started to trudge forward but a sturdy body stopped her. The

confused sergeant opened her eyelids to reveal bleary eyes. Slowly, they adjusted to the light and revealed what had blocked her. Standing directly in front of her was an eight foot tall Covenant Elite. Its most dominant feature, the mandibles that hung from its skull let out a low click, as if in disapproval.

Pierce's body coursed with adrenaline at the site of a Covenant alien. She jumped backwards and reached for the pistol that had been hastily fastened to her belt. A quick hand reached out toward Kelly and restrained her from grabbing her pistol. The sergeant's eyes followed the armored appendage to its owner. She looked up at the angular face, her eyes filled with fear. For an instant the Elite became a Brute that laughed crudely at Pierce, but the image was gone as soon as it had appeared. Time seemed to have frozen the unlikely couple as they stared at each other with different expressions. The young sergeant was helpless against the powerful Elite who gazed menacingly back at her. _Why hadn't this merciless creature killed her?_

After what felt like ages, the Elite broke the silence, "I am not here to harm you human; I have come to ask for your aid in a greater struggle that has arisen, one that dwarves the war between us and you."

First Sergeant Kelly Pierce continued to stare in disbelief at the Covenant alien. All of her previously labeled "ludicrous" thoughts about the connection between Covenant and human invaded her thoughts. _Had she been right all along? Or was this alien luring her into a deadly trap?_ Thinking carefully again, Kelly ruled out the possibility of a trap. If the Elite wanted to kill her, he could have done so long ago. The sergeant felt a strange bond between the alien and her. Perhaps it could be trusted. Kelly looked down at the scorching sand to make her final decision when the Elite loosened his grip. Alarmed, she raised her head and beheld the alien head once again. Her only means of transport had been shot down and she was exhausted. It seemed the Elite left her no choice.

"If you are so intent on recruiting me alien, why did your troops shoot me down? I could have died before you could even speak to me," The sergeant tried to sound as courageous as possible, but she couldn't restrain her stammering.

"Those were not our soldiers human, the Sangheili-" the Elite paused, searching his mind for the right word, "the Elites do not belong to the Covenant anymore. We have been banished by the Prophets and condemned to die."

Realization suddenly dawned on Sergeant Pierce. All of the Covenant she had fought were either Brutes, Drones, or Jackals. It also explained why the Hunters had been held captive. For reasons unknown, they were part of the resistance against the Covenant. The uphill battle with the ruthless Covenant had become desperate when they took a stab at the human home world. It seemed that everyone wanted the war to be over. Sergeant Pierce wanted desperately to trust the solemn figure in front of her. She wanted to join them and destroy what was left of the Covenant and end the slaughter. It was the right thing to do—_right?_ Doubt gnawed at the back of her mind. Just because they no longer referred to themselves as the Covenant didn't mean that they were suddenly fighting with her. She began to wonder what the greater struggle was and if she would have any place in

it.

"You do not trust us human," the Elite had sensed the hesitation in Kelly's mind, "we have little trust in you as well. But we must cast our prejudices aside for now. My brethren and I carry no weapon."

Kelly looked up at the Elite with a puzzled expression. The alien called out into the air and the Elites disengaged their active camouflage, forming a ring around the bewildered sergeant.

"Shit," The sergeant muttered. She was not used to cursing in public. Born in New Chicago, Kelly had been raised in a genteel world. Her over protective parents forbid her to curse or spit. She still couldn't remember how a life of oligarchy turned her into a thick-skinned marine.

"You have nothing to fear human. I am Spienta 'Comarmee and we are the Legion. The Elites around you are my brethren and we have sworn to a command given by the mighty Arbiter himself.

The Legion? The Arbiter? For now, Kelly didn't care about any other aliens with strange biblical names, all she wanted to know what that she would be safe. The Elites seemed to have great respect for the Arbiter, who obviously wanted the humans on his side. For the moment she was reassured, but still confused about the current situation. 'Comarmee, or whatever the Elite's name was, would have to fill her in later.

2. The Conclave

_A/N: _

To address some of the reviews that came up:

HaloElite: I agree with you that I do try to use more sophisticated words in order to convey my thoughts. However, I don't think that they are used too excessively. Sometimes, simple words such as "sit" "run" and "kill" cannot express the ideas vividly. My goal is to paint a picture in the readers mind and let them get straight into the action. The best way to do this in my opinion is to use descriptive words. On the accuracy, I also disagree with the accuracy of "oligarchy". The definition of an "oligarchy" is a government ruled by few, usually powerful. Kelly Pierce was born into a genteel (now if you don't know what that means, look it up) world. This implies that her family had a lot of power. Although her family and some other families do not official govern the city, they have an extremely large amount of influence. All in all, I appreciate your criticism but I feel that I should continue to use descriptive words to convey my thoughts. If a larger audience feels the same way as you do, I might cut back.

Everyone else Thanks for all the reviews!

Special Thanks to aznricechink, a good friend who helped edit my Chapter 1 story. Although he didn't edit this chapter, we often converse with each other about Fan Fiction since we have our own specialties (he has awesome battle scenes while I have original plot). Thanks again!

Undeserved thanks to HaloElite. You know why!

Next chapter: Say hello to an old friend.

****Chapter 2 The Conclave****

****North America****

****Arizona desert 107.95 35.12****

****February 20, 2553 Military Calendar****

****88:25 Mission Clock****

"Come now, human. There is much work to be done if we want to save your planet, and the rest of the galaxy," The elite explained solemnly. Kelly was suddenly struck by the gravity of the situation. She knew it would take a miracle for a bunch of loosely organized aliens and a marine to save the world. 'Comarmee turned around and headed out toward the desert while the ring of elites dispersed and followed him.

"We aren't going to get very far in this heat you know!" Kelly yelled, trying to teach the Elite about Earth's climate. 'Comarmee paid no attention and marched on with the rest of his small squad. They would never be able to save the world if the Elites acted this stupid.

Sergeant Pierce ran after 'Comarmee and his squad, trying not to trip in the uneven sand. On her way, she called to the Elites who seemed to pretend that she hadn't existed. After a short walk, the Elites halted and seemed to have been expecting something. Several seconds passed without incident. But before Kelly could catch up to her new allies, a Phantom appeared out of thin air.

The Covenant transport aircraft sported twin plasma cannons with a larger, central cannon in the middle. The body resembled the head of a cobra poised to strike while its purple coat seemed to glimmer by itself. Kelly jumped at the sight of such a huge apparition. She had fought many special ops Elites who were camouflaged themselves, but had never seen a whole ship become invisible. The Phantom when cloaked blended in perfectly with the sand which was already shimmering from the heat. The sudden sight made her wonder what other types of miraculous technology the Covenantâ€| or the Legion had up their sleeve.

The Elites filed into the miniature gravity lift which delicately picked them off the ground and sent them into the belly of the ship. With all everyone packing in, it seemed that there wouldn't be enough room left for the sergeant. After several minutes, it was finally her turn to enter the gravity lift. She felt a strange pang of nervousness, as if she was a boy learning to swim for the first time. Stepped carefully into the lift, the sergeant felt a dizzying sensation overtake her. Before long, her body left the ground and entered the Phantom.

Despite her previous doubts, there was plenty of room left in the Phantom to accommodate at least five more people. The interior of the ship had been just as magnificent as the outside. The walls glowed an

iridescent purple with light fixtures mounted stealthily within. The sergeant searched around for a place to sit, but found none. All of the Elites stood against the wall of the ship, holding onto nothing but a railing above their heads. Afraid to offend 'Comarmee or any of the other Elites, Kelly joined the rest of the Elites against the wall and patiently waited for departure.

As Kelly waited, the Elites around her began to chatter in their own tongue, no doubt speaking about her. With each word, their mandibles clicked menacingly. The sergeant felt she was being watched from all sides by hostile eyes. Perhaps these aliens would kill her after all. The nervous sergeant mentally shook her head, if they wanted her dead, she would have been dead long ago. Trying shake the discomfort from the Elites, she went about to check the status of her suit. The motion tracker that had usually been littered with yellow dots symbolizing allies was now filled with red dots. Feeling an odd sense of irony, Kelly made a note to herself to ignore the motion tracker. She turned her attention to the top right of her HUD. Losing her weapon in the fall from Pelican Charlie 351, the weapons indicator was blank.

Soon after, the sergeant felt a slight lurch in her stomach. From the slight wobble of the floor, she had deduced that the Phantom was taking off. There were no windows or portholes to look out from so for the rest of the journey, Kelly stood against the wall, trying not to show her fatigue. The Elites around her gave no sign of weariness either as they continued to talk to each other in their strange language.

****North America****

****Unknown -.-.-****

****February 20, 2553 Military Calendar****

****91:45 Mission Clock****

After several hours of flying, the Phantom slowly descended into the thick forest near a cliff face. Sergeant Pierce stepped out of the gravity lift and felt gratified to be on solid ground. The other Elites followed suite and floated down to the ground, each with a strange warping sound from the gravity lift. 'Comarmee came down the gravity lift last, and promptly approached Sergeant Pierce.

"This is where we shall convene for the time being. There is a meeting among many high order Elites in several hours. You will come with me." 'Comarmee's invitation flattered her as much as made her nervous. _What matter would be so important that it would require a human to attend? _

The sergeant pondered this question as she walked through the endless grove of pine, oak, and ash. Behind her, the Phantom faded among the trees, as if it had never existed. The Elites seemed to be heading directly toward the cliff face, which was only a klick away. Kelly felt singled out once again while the other aliens conversed with each other. She hurried up to 'Comarmee who had been the friendliest of the Elites and attempted to strike a conversation. The two companions walked side by side with Kelly's black MARK V contrasting starkly with 'Comarmee's white armor.

" So, what is this meeting about?" Kelly was hesitant, "I mean, what part do I have in this?"

"Human, this is your world and we tread on your land. You can guide us to our goal."

"What is this goal anyways? How are a bunch of Covenant, Legions supposed to save the world?"

"That human, will be explained in due time. You are tired confused at the moment."

"Hey, don't tell me what I am, for all I know, you could still be trying to kill me. Don't think I am your friend now just because I followed you" and it's Kelly."

"What?"

"My name is Kelly," the sergeant felt she had just revealed a family secret to the Elite. She was shocked at how easily she talked to the Elite. He seemed just like one of her friends when she spoke to him.

"I will try to remember that" Kelly," 'Comarmee had a hard time pronouncing the name. The tight group of Elites and Kelly walked on underneath the thick canopy of the forest. The songs of birds and insects filled the air and refused to give the group a moment of peace.

Gradually, the sheer cliff face began to grow taller. The cliff, made of basalt, loomed up with a deep sense of foreboding. When 'Comarmee reached the craggy rock, he moved south, following the cliff and letting it guide him. Soon, he came to a mass of brush that grew rebelliously straight out of the rock. The Elite pushed the brush aside and disappeared into an opening. Kelly reluctantly followed the others into the dark cave.

Inside, the passage beneath the cliff was narrow and steep. Guided by nothing except her hands and ears, the sergeant prudently stumbled forward. The pitch black passageway seemed to slant down at a steep angle towards the center of the rock. As Kelly trudged deeper along the passage way, she was surprised at how cold the air was. Normally, the rock should have been warm and the air stagnant. The air in the tunnel however was cool and crisp, almost artificial. Kelly and the Elites continued forward for several minutes until the air felt as fresh as if it had from the outside.

Peering over the broad shoulders of 'Comarmee in front of her, the sergeant could faintly make out an exit. Much to her relief, the illuminated hole grew until it was about the size of a door. One by one, the team of Elites and Kelly walked out into a massive hallway. The long and narrow room was illuminated by the same eerie purple that had filled the Phantom. Instead of curved walls which lined the Phantom, the walls on either side of the group were smooth and erect. Without the Prophets to command them, the Elites had developed a more innovative way of thinking. Besides the purple lights, the room looked nothing like a Covenant made structure. The large hall seemed windy and cold without the relentless desert sun.

'Comarmee, who was had seen the giant halls several times before did

not stop. He led Kelly and the other Elites forward, walking nonchalantly despite the intimidating walls. As the company drew closer to the back of the hall, the air grew warmer and became harder to breath. Having adjusted to the cool and ventilated air at the entrance, Kelly became uncomfortable as soon as she approached the back of the hall. She tried to endure the stagnant atmosphere as long as she could but in the end, she was forced to switch to the MARK V emergency oxygen reserve.

As soon as the suit began releasing oxygen, a pale blue bar appeared above her shield indicator. During the development of the MARK V, researchers had found that soldiers on the battlefield often had to breathe unclean air. Through years of research, they had finally concluded that dirty air affected the performance of the soldier. A temporary oxygen tank had been slapped onto the MARK V at the last second before initial testing. The compressed oxygen tank located on the back of the armor had added a formidable amount of weight, but as Kelly breathed in her first breath of pure air, she felt that every ounce had been justified.

At the end of the hall, 'Comarmee led the company right, through a much smaller hallway. For the next ten minutes, Kelly and the others walked deeper into the cliff side. The Legion hideout seemed like a maze to the sergeant. She had lost her sense of direction after the first few turns and realized that if she wandered away from 'Comarmee, it would be impossible to find an exit.

At last, 'Comarmee and the rest of the company eventually arrived at a capacious room occupied by more Elites. The room wasn't particularly high or large, but the domed ceiling gave the impression of a stadium. While the other followers of 'Comarmee scattered to the various corners of the room, Kelly was led forward toward a lighted platform that resembled a stage.

"I apologize for such an urgent meeting but the Prophet has arrived earlier than predicted. Do not feel disheartened human warrior, you will receive the rest that I have promised," 'Comarmee whispered toward Kelly while nudging her forward. All of a sudden, the sergeant felt the stern gaze of all the Elites in the room. As she looked around, she could pick out at least twenty of the aliens through the dim lights, their smooth armor glinting whenever they moved slightly.

While the others were safely shrouded in shadow, Kelly stood in the center of the room with a bright light trained on her. Although Kelly was fully dressed and protected under the MJOLNR armor, she felt exposed and naked. The others were safe behind the dark corners, but Kelly stood in the center of the room with a bright light trained on her. Each gaze seemed to pierce through her armor and clothing, gnawing at her flesh. Underneath the intense light, Kelly's heart began to beat rapidly and she began to sweat. The nervousness and stress had made her feel hotter in the cool depths of the mountain than in the blistering Nevada desert.

Luckily, the attention soon turned toward 'Comarmee and several other Elites when they joined Kelly in the spotlight. The new Elites quickly formed a circle around the center after the crowd of Elites at the edges of the room fell silent. The aliens all around her were clad in gold and white, each curve in their armor reflecting a blinding flash of light toward Kelly.

"Let the council begin my brethren," one of the Elites to Kelly's right said stolidly, "'Pugnamee, what news of the Prophet's journey?"

"Your honor, the Prophet of Truth seems to be moving ahead of schedule. They will be arriving on Earth in approximately twelve Earth hours," 'Pugnamee stood opposite of Kelly, wearing immaculate white armor. He stood several inches lower than the other Elites and was thinner as well.

"Why have we been misguided then?"

"You honor, the Prophet journeys on a Forerunner vessel. We can only estimate their speed."

The high level Elite clicked his mandible once, signifying a sigh, "very well 'Pugnamee, so the rumors are true. The Prophet of Truth will be arriving shortly my Brethren. We must prepare to intercept him before he discovers the Control Room," The Elite was addressing everyone now.

It was 'Comarmee's turn to speak, "Your honor, we do not have the will or the means to stop Truth and his Brutes. We must gather supporters such as this human here before our attack."

"No, 'Comarmee, There is no time for that now, you saw how long it took to get this one to follow us, and I doubt that she trusts us now," Another Elite interjected. A wave of regret smashed through Kelly after the Elite had uttered those words. The alien had spoken as if she were just an object and couldn't speak for herself. The thought of allying with these aliens slipped deeper past the sergeant's mind and her trust in them faltered.

As 'Comarmee was about to speak again, another Elite ran up to the ring of high-order Elites and whispered something into his ear. A look both of horror and anger filled 'Comarmee's face as the messenger continued to whisper.

"My Brethren," 'Comarmee announced, "The infidels are at the gates! Pardon your honor, but this situation is urgent and we need to address it immediately," He waited for approval.

"I agree 'Comarmee, the meeting will have to wait. Tell everyone to proceed to the armory and grab any weapon they can!" At his announcement, everyone in the room dispersed except for Kelly. In the chaos of battle, she had been forgotten by her Legion companion.

The concentration of Elites quickly dwindled after the chief in command had issued the orders. Not wanting to get lost in the maze of rooms, Kelly quickly spotted 'Comarmee jogging toward the same exit they had come in from. At the sight of 'Comarmee, Kelly's eyes flared. After asking for her help and dragging her all the way to a secret location, the Elite had simply tossed her aside as if she were an old toy. With each alien that passed busily by, she felt another needle of betrayal stab her in the face. Betrayal wasn't something that was new to Kelly; she had experienced it many times before. It was her own false hope in the aliens that really infuriated her. For several seconds she had tossed the idea of following 'Comarmee out of her mind and decided to find a way out on her own, but after

collecting herself, she decided that it wasn't 'Comarmee's fault. After all, his hideout was being invaded and he had just met the helpless human hours before. Kelly berated herself for not having the capacity to empathize with the Elite and pushed the thoughts into the back of her head. Her guide had disappeared through the door, and the sergeant hurried behind. Empathy had no place in war.

The path to the armory was strangely straightforward with almost no turns. The way the Elites walked, it seemed that all their hallways led to the weapons cache. As she progressed through the underground compound, her fear of getting lost quickly faded when she saw the long lines of Elites, Grunts and Hunters marching toward the armory. A short distance from the entrance to the armory, the line halted. Kelly peered past the tall hunched bodies of her new allies and saw a traffic jam of Legion soldiers. Apparently the order to suit up had been given to everyone at once and the sheer amount of soldiers clogged up the hallways.

The sergeant peered once again past the Elites and saw the large circular armory only several meters ahead. She sloppily estimated in her head the amount of troops needed to create such a holdup and realized that the Legion were more numerous than she had imagined. With the Elites, Grunts and Hunters gone from the Covenant, the two factions were pretty much equal in size. The thought of such an immense number of aliens compared to one human made Kelly nervous. It wasn't possible that they wanted only one human soldier on their side. As she stood in line, realization dawned on her. She was brought to the Legion for a special purpose. Suddenly, a cold chill raced up her spine. The sergeant looked around at the source of the sudden drop in temperature and found she still had her armor on. There wasn't any drop in temperature.

The nervousness began to twist at her stomach the closer she got to the armory. Hundreds of thoughts attacked Kelly's mind, the outcome of the battle, her means of escape, and the purpose she was meant to serve. Her mind was being weakened by the distractions and she knew that could not be accepted in battle. But no matter how hard she tried, the thoughts of the future kept invading her brain. She physically shook her head, hopelessly trying to rattle the thoughts out. 'Comarmee and the Elite behind her stared at the crazy human between them, wondering if she had been infected by the Flood.

The line moved, but the thoughts would not. She felt her very head begin to pulse, as if it were her heart. Each beat was accompanied by a sharp pain. The line moved several steps closer to the armory. Kelly couldn't control the thoughts now. Her early childhood played in her brain, then the Covenant, then 'Comarmee. The line moved closer still. What the hell was happening to her? Kelly reached for her face, trying to get to the thoughts with her hands but found her helmet obstructing the way. She tried to rip it off but the oxygen seal had locked it. She was only two meters away from the entrance now. All of a sudden, as she passed through the threshold into the weapons cache and saw the endless rows of guns, her mind diverged on one single thought: death. The carcasses of Elites, Brutes, Jackals and humans seemed to play like a movie on her HUD. All thoughts of empathy, sympathy and morals were erased from Kelly as she marched over toward the stacks of covenant crates. She shoes a Covenant or Legion carbine and checked the ammo meter. After being unarmed for several hours, a weapon albeit alien, felt good against her hand. Her HUD suddenly gave a beep and the corresponding clip of carbine ammo

appeared on the top right of the screen. She then walked toward the table of plasma grenades and pocketed four. The grenade indicator on her HUD immediately changed. As a weapon of last resort, Kelly lifted up two plasma rifles and attached them to each buckle on her MARK V armor.

Just when she was about to walk out of the armory, her HUD beeped again, this time signaling a low oxygen tank. She had been so busy contemplating the battle that she had forgotten to turn the oxygen off. Now that the air in her armor was almost empty, there would be no need to keep it on any longer.

Outside of the armory, 'Comarmee and a smaller company of Elites waited for Kelly. They hadn't forgotten her after all.

"There are too many Covenant here. We must find a quick escape route as it would be useless to fight them," 'Comarmee explained to Kelly. Kelly cocked her head around and saw the Elites waiting for her. 'Comarmee immediately turned his head away when her gaze fell on him. Every word that he said was a lie. The sergeant had seen the number of Legions around the compound. It would take a whole army to take them out. No, she was meant for a special purpose and she had to stay alive.

"Of course," Kelly replied, going along with the lie. With 'Comarmee in the lead, the company of Elites and Kelly jogged away from the Amory, towards the outer walls of the compound. As they rounded the first corner, Kelly could hear the familiar sounds of war. On the other side of the door was an intense battle between two former allies. She looked up to 'Comarmee, calculating his reaction. He noticed the gaze and met Kelly's eyes through the helmet.

Both 'Comarmee and Kelly stepped forward and activated the automatic doors. It slid easily open and revealed a Brute and an Elite fighting hand to hand on the floor. They rolled into the hallway and the automatic doors hissed closed again. In his rage, the Brute had not noticed the other Elites and continued to bash its head against the disoriented Legion soldier. One of the Elites drew his plasma rifle and fired two shots at the Brute's head. It went instantly limp while still on top of its enemy.

Before entering the fray again, the team of Elites and Kelly readied their weapons. This time 'Comarmee stepped forward to open the doors. The rest of the Elites entered quickly and ducked behind cover. Kelly followed suite, unsure where to go. Amid the screams and pulses of plasma fire, Kelly looked around to find that she knelt next to 'Comarmee.

"We make for the door opposite this one," 'Comarmee pointed to the hallway they had just come out of, "Follow me and stay out of trouble!" Without warning, the Elite sprang up onto the crate he was using for cover. He squeezed the trigger and sprayed the general area free of Covenant troops. "Go Now!" Kelly spun around and bolted toward the opposite end of the room, her carbine at the ready. The length of the room had been longer than she had anticipated and she found herself constantly ducking for cover. Kelly peered around a crate to see four Jackals in a triangle formation. The bird-like aliens held up their shields and pressed steadily forward. The sergeant steadied her carbine and aimed at the nearest Jackal. She pressed the trigger down with no remorse and hit the alien in the

hand. It immediately dropped its plasma pistol in pain and ran wildly around the others with his shield over his head. The tight formation had broken up and given Kelly the chance to run. She struggled to get to her feet and ran for her life once again.

This time Kelly had made it to the opposite side without much resistance. She turned around to look for 'Comarmee and saw him in the middle of room, pinned down behind a pillar. The weak column was being bombarded with waves of plasma and continued to deteriorate. Meanwhile, the Elite hiding behind it had no choice but to watch his only source of cover melt away. Kelly instinctively raised her carbine and swung the barrel in a Brute's direction. The ape-like creature had mangy blue hair running down its body. She opened fire, making sure each shot hit its target in the head. The Brute immediately stopped firing toward the column and turned its attention toward Kelly. It dropped the trademark plasma rifle and bounded toward the surprised sergeant. The creature although large, moved with amazing speed. Within second, it had lessened the gap by half and continued to charge toward Kelly. In the split second between life and death, the sergeant fired one last shot straight through the Brutes head. It slowed down, gave a roar of pain, and toppled to the ground with a dull thud.

'Comarmee saw his chance to escape and dashed from the cover of the column just as it crumpled into pieces. His legs moving like pistons pushing off the floor, brought him to Kelly in only four bounds. The automatic doors hissed open as 'Comarmee ventured too closely. The long hallway on the other side stretched on for several hundred meters before curving right. 'Comarmee looked through the empty corridor and swung his head back toward the battle. The Elites, although determined, were fighting a hopeless battle. Sooner or later, the reckless strength of the Brutes would overwhelm the whole stronghold.

Still flashing green, the door to the hallway remained opened, waiting for 'Comarmee to walk through. He was a warrior and would never run from any battle, not even if he was outnumbered and outgunned. Time seemed to slow as 'Comarmee thought it through, his conscience debating with his instincts. A Covenant deserved to die if he even had doubts about entering a battle. He was as much a traitor as the Heretic himself. Shame and guilt reeled around in 'Comarmee's head, threatening to turn his body around. But he was no longer a Covenant; he was part of the Legion. A Brute ran past 'Comarmee, charging headfirst into a group of Elites. It was instantly slaughtered as five streams of plasma raced to its head. Those were the Covenant, headstrong savages who cared nothing for strategy or prudence. This wasn't time to die, not stupidly for a useless cause.

'Comarmee had made up his mind and sprinted down the hallway. He suddenly slowed and doubled back, grabbing for his companion. Kelly flew backwards into the hall just before the doors closed. The sounds of battle were immediately dulled, giving the sergeant and 'Comarmee a moment of awkward silence.

"We must go from this place, it is hopeless here," Comarmee commanded. Kelly looked through her helmet shocked; Elites never ran from a battle. She was about to get up and deride him, but thought better of it and remained silent. She picked herself up off the floor and made for the other end of the hall. They would both need each

other if they wanted to survive.

End
file.